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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the extent to which school characteristics would interfere with or enhance a shared decision making (SDM) team's ability to address issues of academic achievement as mandated by New York State. A group of 108 SDM team chairpersons in New York State public high schools completed surveys about school characteristics and issues that SDM teams address. The data were sorted and broken into quartiles according to school characteristic: (1) school performance outcomes, as measured by the percentage of Regents diplomas awarded; (2) socioeconomic status (SES), as measured by the Census Poverty Index; and (3) school size, as measured by enrollment. The data for the top and bottom quartiles were examined in a qualitative manner. Data analysis indicated that, overall, groups of teams addressed similar issues at similar rates. There were no differences between top and bottom groups of teams on academic issues in high and low achievement outcome schools, in high and low SES districts, and in large and small schools. One exception was the extent to which SDM teams in low performance schools were better at identifying strategies to measure the impact on student achievement than were SDM teams in high performance schools. (Contains 22 references). (SM)

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Selected School Variables and the Achievement Related Activities of Shared Decision-Making Teams

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INTRODUCTION

Shared Decision-Making (SDM) is being incorporated in schools across the nation, often as part of a larger reform effort like Site Based Management (SBM)., In New York State, Commissioner's Regulation 100.11 requires the establishment of an SDM team in each public school, and charges it with the task of improving student academic performance. Proponents, in general, tout the improvement of academic achievement as SDM's primary purpose. However, quantitative research is scant and inconsistent in revealing whether SDM team decision making truly contributes to the improvement of student academic achievement. Furthermore, the literature is unclear regarding the factors which make the difference in schools where SDM teams are successful.

A study conducted by O'Connell and Yadegari (1996) examined the issue areas that 108 New York State public high school teams addressed; and whether or not teams identified methods to measure the impact of their decisions on student achievement. In general, chairpersons indicated that their teams addressed issues that they perceived had already impacted or might potentially impact student academic performance. Still unexamined, however, was whether differences existed regarding school SDM teams and their efficacy in improving student academic performance as defined by certain school building characteristics. This study, as an extension of the original, examined differences in SDM team chairperson responses to questions about targeting academic achievement issues when the districts were divided into quartiles by three variables. The schools were grouped by these variables: socio-economic status

(SES), school achievement outcomes, and school size. The researchers hypothesized that there would be variation between the top and bottom quartiles of schools in their success in targeting student academic performance issues.

RATIONALE AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

School-site reforms, like SBM, have become quite popular and have been adopted and implemented in schools in forty-four states (Herman & Herman, 1993). Many times, site-level reforms include some form of participatory or shared decision making, which allows for various stake-holder group representatives to become involved in making decisions which could directly impact those at the site-level. Though adapting to SDM takes considerable time and effort for it to be successful, there is no dearth of compelling reasons favoring its use.

The literature is replete with arguments favoring the use of SDM. Proponents maintain that it would allow teachers the opportunity to give input about their work, contributing to the advancement of professionalism and increasing job satisfaction and morale (Conley & Bacharach, 1990; Liontos, 1994; Weiss, 1993; Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992). Involving stakeholders in decision-making also gives them a sense of ownership and responsibility which are critical to ensuring the implementation of the team's decision (Liontos, 1994; Weiss, 1993; Weiss & Cambone, 1994). SDM involvement serves to ensure that better decisions are made, as decision-makers are, presumably, those with close, intimate knowledge about children (Kannapel, 1994; Miller, 1995). Also, it is a process which may help to unleash teacher

creativity (Miller, 1995; Weiss, 1993). These final justifications are related to the fundamental argument favoring SDM's use: that it contributes to the improvement of student academic achievement (David, 1995-1996; McNeill & McNeill, 1994; Wagstaff, 1995; Weiss, 1993).

In New York State, the reasoning is similar. A mandate requires that each public school building assemble an SDM team, the participants of which include administrators, teachers, and parents, at a minimum. Explicit in each team's mission is that decision-making should be focused on, if not limited to, issues which would impact student academic achievement. "The purpose of ...shared decision-making shall be to improve the educational performance of all students in the school," (Regional School Services Teams, 1996, p. 1).

Despite the arguments in favor of its use, the handful of quantitative studies which exist that examine the extent to which student academic achievement is improving as a result of SDM indicate mixed results. Taylor and Bogotch (1994), in a study of teachers' participation in decision making, found no indication that teacher involvement in SDM had any impact on selected student performance outcomes. Thomas (1995) solicited teachers' opinions about the possible effects SDM might have on contributing to student achievement improvement. Though 83 percent of respondents indicated that they believe SDM leads to school improvement in general, the majority of the respondents did not believe that students are improving in the specific areas of reading, math, or attendance, as a result of SDM. In another study (Weiss, 1993), 191 school members were surveyed regarding decisions made in

schools. Little difference was found between decisions made by the SDM teams in six SDM schools and those made by principals in six non-SDM schools. Furthermore, in an overview of studies on site level reforms and their impact on student achievement (Summers & Johnson, 1995), just a small number were found to have positive results. Of the twenty studies reviewed, only two demonstrated that student academic achievement improvement occurred and produced achievement data to prove it.

Other researchers have found positive results. Kannapel (1994) looked at four Kentucky school districts which had implemented school site decision-making, and found that teams dealt with a number of issues, including those related to curriculum and instruction, the issue areas, presumably, which would have the greatest impact on the improvement of student performance. Also, Wagstaff's (1995) study of two schools with SBM and SDM found that those teams also addressed curriculum and instruction issues. Ramey and Dornseif (1994) examined the effect of SDM on thirteen schools by looking at CAT scores from the year prior to implementation of SDM to the next year, just after implementation. CAT score changes showed an increase in performance, overall. A New York State Education Department Survey found that the vast majority, 92.4 percent, of SDM team members surveyed indicated that their teams explored or studied curriculum and instruction issues (Regional School Services Team, 1996).

Finally, O'Connell and Yadegari (1996) surveyed 108 public high school SDM team chairpersons in New York State. Questions were asked about the type of decisions teams were making.

Overall, the researchers found that teams were attempting to target the improvement of student academic achievement. However, just less than half of those who claimed that their teams made decisions which had impacted or potentially could impact student achievement failed to identify any means by which they would measure this improvement.

A review of the literature also indicates that studies which examine the extent to which building characteristics cause differences in the teams' ability to successfully impact student academic achievement is virtually non-existent. In one study (O'Hora-Weir & Ganople, 1996), researchers examined various school level characteristics which might make an individual school more likely to adopt a version of decentralized reform, School Community-Based Management (SCBM). They found that attendance rates and the level of education within the community were significant and correlated, respectively, with a school's decision to adopt SCBM. The percentage of students on free and reduced lunch was found to negatively impact the tendency to adopt SCBM. In this case, school characteristics did appear to influence a school's likelihood of adopting SCBM.

The lack of consistent, positive findings leads many researchers and educators to conclude that the call for SDM and other site-level reforms is unjustifiable (Brown, 1993; Guskey & Peterson, 1995-1996; McNeill & McNeill, 1995; Miller, 1995; Robertson, Wohlstetter, & Mohrman, 1995; Summers & Johnson, 1995; Taylor and Bogotch, 1994; Taylor & Levine, 1991; Weiss, 1993; Weiss & Cambone, 1994). Still, positive findings have been identified, suggesting that, in some schools, SDM has been a

successful endeavor. New questions develop, then, regarding the various factors which might make some schools more apt to target issues related to the improvement of student academic achievement.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The current study explores the extent to which school characteristics may interfere with or enhance an SDM team's ability to address academic-oriented issues. Characteristics are examined relative to the SDM team's self-reported success in improving student academic achievement. Regardless of the inconsistency of findings in the research, mandated SDM remains as an expected permanent feature of New York State public schools. As a result, questions arise concerning what might explain differences in the level of SDM team success. To what extent do differences amongst schools contribute to their SDM teams' varied success in targeting student achievement issues? Which factors play a greater role in the disparity? This study sought to investigate, in an exploratory manner, the differences which occur as a result of school characteristics, such as achievement outcomes, socio-economic status (SES), and school size.

The variables examined were selected for a number of reasons. First, it is reasonable to expect that, in schools with high achievement outcomes, vehicles may already be in place which have traditionally addressed issues of student academic performance. Unlike in schools with low achievement outcomes, SDM teams in schools of high performance may direct their efforts toward other issue areas rather than toward issues which they perceive they have already successfully addressed through other processes.

Next, schools in high socio-economic status districts are often perceived as having advantages over those in low socio-economic status districts regarding the availability of resources. Implementing SDM in those schools may be facilitated by opportunities for preparation and training for team members on the purpose of SDM and on how to participate in the process of decision making. Therefore, it is anticipated that school SDM teams in high SES districts will be more likely to focus on student academic achievement issues than school SDM teams in low SES districts. Furthermore, schools in low SES districts are sometimes barraged with a cadre of control issues that tend to interfere with their ability to address the more critical issues that might contribute to the improvement of student academic achievement. The issues associated with control of the environment include the ensuring of student and staff safety, the amount of disciplinary infractions that occur, and the level of occurrence of vandalism of the school building or property. It is anticipated that school SDM teams in low-SES districts would spend more time on control issues than School SDM teams in high SES districts.

Finally, large schools are sometimes described as formal, centralized, and impersonal; characteristics that run contrary to the often informal, personal, small school environment, which appears more receptive to open communication and shared decision making. Success in targeting student achievement issues would be expected to occur more readily in small schools than in large schools, because of the nature of the environment, while large school SDM teams would be expected to focus more on operational

issues, like daily management, building cleanliness and upkeep, personnel, and budgeting.

METHODOLOGY

The current study is exploratory research at the descriptive level to determine if further study in this area is warranted. It is an extension of a data set collected in a previous study (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996). Previous data were analyzed in the aggregate to determine the issues SDM teams were addressing. In this study, data were disaggregated based on different school building characteristics: level of student achievement outcomes, socio-economic status, and school size. To facilitate the comparison, the researchers only looked at top and bottom quartiles of data, since, if differences exist, this is where they are most likely to appear.

Research Design

One hundred and eight SDM team chairpersons in New York State public high schools were surveyed in a recent study regarding the issues SDM teams address (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996). School district descriptive information was added to the original data set and it was reanalyzed by examining top and bottom group percentages of chairpersons reporting that their teams worked on various types of issues. Whether or not they identified methods by which to measure the impact of those decisions was also examined.

The data were sorted and broken into quartiles, as per each school characteristic. Top and bottom quartiles were analyzed by

calculating percentages of total respondents who indicated either a positive or negative response to the question at hand. The percentage of respondents who did not answer the question was also calculated. Missing responses were not included in the percentage calculation for only two issues, control issues and operational issues, as the number of missing responses was high in these issue categories. Though quartile totals in these cases were reduced, in all cases, the amount of reduction was equal or nearly equal in both top and bottom quartiles.

Two general types of variables were examined: school performance outcomes, as measured by the percentage of Regents diplomas awarded, and socio-economic status (SES), as measured by the Census Poverty Index (CPI). These data were obtained from *The New York State School Report Card* (1996), for each school, and from New York State's *Statistical Profiles of Public School Districts* (1996), for each school district. The descriptive variable of school size, as measured by enrollment, was also examined. Data for school enrollment was obtained from *The New York State School Report Card* (1996).

The researchers hypothesized, first, that SDM teams in schools with high achievement outcomes, as measured by the percentage of Regents diplomas awarded, would focus less on issues associated with student academic achievement than SDM teams in schools with low achievement outcomes. Second, SDM teams in schools in high SES districts, as measured by the Census Poverty Index (CPI), would be more apt to target student academic achievement issues than teams in schools in low-SES districts. It was hypothesized, in addition, that SDM teams in low SES schools

would be more likely to address issues associated with control over the school environment: discipline, cleanliness and building upkeep, and student and staff safety. Finally, it was hypothesized that, in large schools, as measured by student enrollment, there would be more of a tendency than in small schools for SDM teams to focus on operational issues, like daily management issues, cleanliness and upkeep of the building, personnel, and budgeting. Instead, schools with smaller student populations would tend to address issues related to student academic performance more than schools with larger student populations.

The data for the top and bottom quartiles were examined in a qualitative manner regarding issue areas addressed and the reasons why SDM teams were not addressing issues that would impact academic achievement, if that were the case. The variables of achievement outcomes, socio-economic status, and enrollment were described relative to student academic performance, only, since respondent comments were focused on this issue area. The researchers looked for patterns of issues addressed and for patterns of reasons why teams failed to address issues that would contribute to student performance, in high performance schools, in high SES districts, and in low enrollment schools.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Description of Aggregated Data and Disaggregated Quartiles of Data

Since top and bottom groups were analyzed for comparative purposes, it is important to describe each of the quartiles

(Tables 1-3). Overall, top and bottom quartiles for all three school characteristics vary considerably. A mean of 61.7 percent in the top quartile suggests that schools in this group awarded the highest percentage of Regents diplomas and, therefore, are high academic outcomes schools. The mean of schools in the bottom quartile, which awarded the lowest percentage of Regents diplomas, is 26.5 percent. The reference point is 45.4 percent, the mean of the original sample (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996).

The Census Poverty Index (CPI) was used as an measure of socio-economic status. Overall, the mean of the CPI for the original data set is 9.3. School districts in the bottom quartile are comprised of low SES families, as suggested by the CPI mean of 18.7. On the other hand, school districts in the top quartile are comprised of high SES families, with a CPI mean of 2.5.

Finally, means were calculated for enrollment, as a measure of school size. For the top quartile of enrollment, the mean of 1,554.6 suggests schools in this group are quite large. The bottom quartile's mean of 412.4 contains schools of small size. The enrollment for the whole group is 910.5.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Original Sample

	Mean	S.D.	Minimum	Maximum	N
% Regents Dip.	45.4	14.37	0.0	76.0	101
CPI	9.3	6.77	1.0	28.0	89
Enrollment	910.5	453.0	209.0	2,100.0	103

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for the Top Quartile

	Mean	S.D.	Minimum	Maximum	N
% Regents Dip.	61.7	6.1	54.0	76.0	25
CPI	2.5	0.6	1.0	3.0	21
Enrollment	1,554.6	269.93	1,224.0	2,100.0	25

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for the Bottom Quartile

	Mean	S.D.	Minimum	Maximum	N
% Regents Dip.	26.5	11.62	0.0	38.0	25
CPI	18.7	4.9	14.0	28.0	23
Enrollment	412.4	81.1	209	542	25

High Performance vs. Low Performance Schools

Do SDM teams in high achievement outcome schools focus less on issues associated with student academic achievement than SDM teams in schools with low academic achievement?

Chairpersons in a previous study (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996) were asked if their teams had made decisions that had led to student academic improvement or could potentially lead to the improvement of student achievement. Eighty-four of 108 chairpersons, or 77.8 percent, in the original study indicated this to be the case. Similar percentages of both top and bottom

performance groups are claiming to address issues associated with student academic achievement: 76.0 percent of the respondents in the top quartile and 76.0 percent of the respondents in the bottom quartile claimed that their teams targeted student academic achievement issues. There was no difference between SDM team decision-making in high and low performance schools.

In addition, chairpersons were asked to identify the methods used to measure the impact of their decision on student achievement (Table 4). Of those reporting decisions related to student achievement in the original study (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996), 67.4 percent were able to identify a measurement strategy. Similarly, twelve of the 19 respondents (63.2 percent), in the top quartile, who indicated that their teams addressed issues related to the improvement of student achievement, identified measurement strategies. The bottom quartile was different. Eighteen of the 19 chairpersons (94.7 percent) indicated that their teams have targeted achievement issues and were able to identify a strategy by which to measure this achievement. This percentage is considerably greater than those of the top quartile and overall sample, suggesting that SDM teams in low performance schools are more likely to identify measurement strategies than SDM teams in high performance schools.

Table 4

Comparison of SDM Team Decisions Related to Achievement in High and Low Performance Schools, as Measured by the Percentage of Regents Diplomas Awarded

	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile
Claimed a Current or Future Impact on Achievement	76.0%,*yes* 12.0%,*no* 12%, *no response*	76.0%,*yes* 20.0%,*no* 4%, *no response*
Identified a Measurement Strategy	63.2%,*yes* 36.8%,*no*	94.7%,*yes* 5.3%,*no*

High SES vs. Low SES Schools

Are SDM teams in schools in high SES districts more apt to target student academic achievement issues than school SDM teams in low SES districts? Are SDM teams in schools in low SES districts more likely to target issues associated with control over the school environment?

SDM teams in high and low SES groups target student achievement issues almost as much as the original sample of SDM teams did (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996). The percentage of positive responses in the top CPI quartile, 66.7 percent, is close to that of the bottom CPI quartile, 73.9 percent (Table 5). SDM school teams in low SES districts were just as likely to target performance issues as SDM school teams in high SES districts. Of those who claimed their teams addressed issues that have impacted or could potentially impact student achievement, only seven of fourteen (or 50 percent) in the upper quartile identified a measurement strategy, and eleven of seventeen (or 64.7 percent) of

the bottom group did so. These seemed to correspond with the percentage of those reporting decisions related to student achievement in the original sample (67.4 percent).

Table 5

Comparison of SDM Team Decisions Related to Achievement in Schools in High- and Low-SES Districts, as Measured by the Census Poverty Index

	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile
Claimed a Current or Future Impact on Achievement	66.7%,*yes* 19.0%,*no* 14.3%, *no response*	73.9%,*yes* 17.4%,*no* 8.7%, *no response*
Identified a Measurement Strategy	50.0%,*yes* 50.0%,*no*	64.7%,*yes* 35.3%,*no*

The next question focused on whether SDM school teams in low SES districts addressed issues of control over the environment more than SDM school teams in high SES districts. Control issues like discipline, staff and student safety, and building cleanliness or upkeep comprised ten percent of the total group of issues, unrelated to student achievement, addressed by SDM teams in the previous study (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996). Though it was hypothesized that in low SES districts there would be more emphasis of SDM school teams on issues related to control than in high SES districts, the opposite appears to be true. Sixty percent of SDM team chairpersons in high SES districts indicated discipline is an issue addressed, while less than half, or 41.7 percent, of those in low SES districts did so. Likewise, 60 percent of SDM team chairpersons in high SES districts identified

cleanliness and building upkeep as addressed by their SDM teams, while only 25 percent of those in low SES districts did so. Issues of student and staff safety fall closer to the expected outcome, with only ten percent of school teams in high SES districts addressing these areas and 41.7 percent of school teams in low SES districts doing so (Table 6).

Table 6

Comparison of SDM Team Decisions of School Environment Control Issues in Schools in High- and Low-SES Districts, as Measured by the Census Poverty Index

Control Issues:	Top Quartile		Bottom Quartile	
Discipline	60.0%,*yes*	40.0%,*no*	41.7%,*yes*	58.3%,*no*
Cleanliness	60.0%,*yes*	40.0%,*no*	25.0%,*yes*	75.0%,*no*
Student Safety	10.0%,*yes*	90.0%,*no*	41.7%,*yes*	58.3%,*no*
Staff Safety	10.0%,*yes*	90.0%,*no*	41.7%,*yes*	58.3%,*no*

Overall, with the possible exception of the issue of cleanliness, there appears to be little in terms of difference between high- and low-SES groups of SDM teams and the types of issues they address.

Large vs. Small Schools

Is there more of a tendency for SDM teams in large schools, as measured by student enrollment rates, to address operational issues, like daily management, building cleanliness and upkeep, personnel, and budget, as compared with SDM teams in small schools? Will SDM teams in small schools be more likely than SDM

teams in large schools to address issues related to student academic performance?

Only a small percentage (11.7 percent) of non-achievement issues identified in a previous study as being unrelated to student academic achievement were addressed by teams. These were issues of daily management, interviewing and hiring, and budgeting (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996). Examination of top and bottom enrollment quartiles suggest that the majority of SDM teams in both large and small schools do not address these issues. Thirty-six point four percent and 35.7 percent of large and small schools, respectively, address daily management issues. A very small percentage, 18.2 percent and 7.1 percent of large and small schools, respectively, address issues associated with personnel, like interviews and hiring. Finally, only 36.4 percent of large schools and 14.3 percent of small schools address budgetary issues (See Table 7).

Table 7

Comparison of SDM Team Decisions of Operational Issues in Large and Small Schools, as Measured by Enrollment

	Top Quartile		Bottom Quartile	
Operational Issues:				
Daily Management	36.4%,*yes*	63.6%,*no*	35.7%,*yes*	64.3%,*no*
Personnel	18.2%,*yes*	81.8%,*no*	7.1%,*yes*	92.9%,*no*
Budget	36.4%,*yes*	63.6%,*no*	14.3%,*yes*	85.7%,*no*

Finally, top and bottom enrollment quartiles indicate that

large and small schools address student achievement issues to a similar extent (see Table 8). Seventy-two percent of top quartile schools , or large schools, and 64.0 percent of bottom quartile schools, or small schools, claimed that their team made decisions which have impacted or potentially could impact student academic achievement. Also, similar percentages of each group of positive responses were able to identify a measurement strategy. These were 61.1 percent for the top quartile and 68.8 percent for the bottom quartile.

Large school SDM teams are no more likely to address operational issues, like daily management, personnel, and budget, than small schools SDM teams, nor are small schools more likely to address academic issues than large schools.

Table 8

Comparison of SDM Team Decisions of Academic Issues in Large and Small Schools, as Measured by School Enrollment

	Top Quartile		Bottom Quartile	
Claimed a Current or Future Impact on Achievement	72.0%,*yes* 4.0%, *no response*	24.0%,*no*	64.0%,*yes* 16.%, *no response*	20.0%,*no*
Identified a Measurement Strategy	61.1%,*yes*	38.9%,*no*	68.8%,*yes*	31.2%,*no*

Descriptive Differences Between Top and Bottom Achievement Outcomes Schools

In the original sample, the most frequently cited SDM issue areas identified by chairpersons as related to student achievement

were modifications to the instructional program and the raising of academic standards (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996). Other issue areas addressed included the modification of student assessment procedures, the modification of student practices and policies, and the establishment of student recognition efforts. Respondents in the top quartile identified two main categories of issues addressed by teams, the modification of instructional program and the modification of student assessment procedures (see Table 9). Interestingly, all of the instructional program modifications in the top quartile focused on the development of programs for low-achieving students. High achievement outcomes schools appear to be targeting a few particular types of issues, one of which is the focus on low performance students. In the bottom quartile, a sizable number of teams focused on the modification of the instructional program. Other issues were also addressed.

Table 9

Student Achievement Issues Addressed by SDM Teams in High and Low Performance Schools, as Measured by the Percent of Regents Diplomas Awarded

Top Quartile	
Categories of Issues:	**Total: 18**
Modified the Instructional Program	5
Creation of Programs for Low-Achieving/ At-Risk Students	
Modified Student Assessment Procedures	8
Changed Assessment Methods	
Other	5

Bottom Quartile

Categories of Issues:	**Total: 19**
Modified the Instructional Program *Graduation Requirements* *Modified Curricula*	6
Modified Practices and Policies *Attendance Incentives*	3
Modified Student Assessment Procedures *Changed Assessment Methods*	2
Established Student Recognition Efforts *Academic Incentives*	2
Other Issues	6

Respondents from the top and bottom achievement groups, who indicated that their teams were not targeting student achievement issues, were asked to indicate why (Table 10). The most frequently cited reasons in the original study were that the teams focused on issues unrelated to student achievement and that SDM is a long and difficult process (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996). Top group respondents, a total of three, suggested that work-to-rule and staff entrenchment disrupt the SDM process. In both groups of schools, non-cooperation of participants impede the success of SDM. Responses like administrative control over decision-making and contract difficulties comprised the majority of responses characterizing the five bottom quartile responses. One teacher, and union president, writes that the administrative stranglehold over decision-making is "...causing the failure of CR 100.11 in school districts in NY State."

Table 10

Reasons Given for SDM Team Failure to Address Academic Issues in High and Low Performance Schools

Top Quartile	
Reasons:	**Total: 3**
Work-to-rule disrupts the process	1
Staff entrenchment	1
Achievement is high - no need to focus on academic issues	1
Bottom Quartile	
Reasons:	**Total: 5**
Administrative control over decision-making	2
Contract dispute	1
Still in the information gathering stage	1
Other structures already in place to address academic issues	1

Descriptive Differences Between High and Low SES Districts

In the top quartile (see Table 11), eleven out of fourteen issues addressed included modifications to the instructional program, the raising academic standards, and modifications to assessment procedures, all most frequently cited issue areas of the entire group of respondents (O'Connell & Yadegari, 1996). In the bottom group, issues identified by respondents as being addressed by teams include the modification of the instructional program, the modification of assessment procedures, modifications

of student policies and practices, and the establishment of student recognition efforts. No striking differences appear between the two SES groups in this category.

Table 11

Student Achievement Issues Addressed by SDM Teams in High and Low SES Schools, as Measured by the CPI

Top Quartile	
Categories of Issues:	**Total: 14**
Modified Instructional Program *Scheduling Changes* *Established Alternative Programs*	6
Raised Academic Standards *Honor Roll Changes*	3
Modified Assessment Procedures *Changed Assessment Methods* *Changed Grading Policy*	2
Modified Practices and Policies *Discipline*	2
Other	1
Bottom Quartile	
Categories of Issues:	**Total: 17**
Established or Expanded Student Recognition Efforts *Academic Incentives*	4
Modified Student Practices and Policies *Attendance*	3
Modified Assessment Procedures *Changed assessment Methods* *Revised Testing Schedule* *Sought Variance*	3
Modified Instructional Program *Scheduling*	2
Other	5

Top and bottom SES group respondents who indicated that their teams were not addressing student performance issues gave reasons (Table 12). These included the amount of time spent on decision-making and a lack of training, in the bottom quartile, and work-to-rule disruptions and administrative stone-walling, in the top quartile. One administrator writes, "This is an ineffective process - parents want control of items they don't understand - and teachers see it as a union opportunity." It appears that conflicts amongst school members within the school environment impact an SDM team's ability to function successfully.

Table 12

Reasons Given for SDM Team Failure to Address Academic Issues in High- & Low-SES Districts

Top Quartile	
Reasons:	**Total: 4**
Work-to-rule disrupts the process	1
Poor attendance of team members	1
Administrative stonewalling	1
Lack of understanding of SDM's purpose	1
Bottom Quartile	
Reasons:	**Total: 5**
Difficulty getting stockholder representatives to participate	1
Lack of training	1
Too much time to get process going	1
Time wasted on unimportant issues	1
Vehicles already in place to address academic	1

Descriptive Differences Between Large and Small Schools

In large schools, as indicated by the top enrollment quartile, teams addressed issues associated with modified instructional programs and modified assessment procedures most frequently. The same issues were addressed by small schools, as indicated by the bottom quartile (Table 13).

Table 13

Student Achievement Issues Addressed by SDM Teams in Large & Small Schools, as Measured by Enrollment

Top Quartile	
Categories of Issues:	**Total: 18**
Modified Instructional Program *Modified Curricula* *Established Alternative Education Program*	4
Modified Student Assessment Procedures *Changed Assessment* *Changed Grading*	3
Established Student Recognition Efforts *Achievement Incentives*	3
Modified Student Policies and Practices *Attendance*	2
Other	6

Bottom Quartile	
Categories of Issues:	**Total: 16**
Modified Instructional Program *Alternative Education Programs* *Scheduling*	4

Modified Student Assessment Procedures *Changed Assessment* *Changed Grading* *Revised Test Schedules*	4	
Established Student Recognition Programs *Achievement Incentives*	3	—
Other	5	

Respondents also who indicated why teams did not address academic issues (See Table 14). Four out of the five in the bottom quartile identified conflicts with key players, like administrators, union members, and other stakeholders, within the school as the reason SDM was stifled. The top quartile also suggested difficulties arose as a result of significant power-holders. Administrators and union leaders were mentioned.

Table 14

Reasons Given for SDM Team Failure to Address Academic Issues in Large and Small Schools

Top Quartile

Reasons:	**Total: 6**
Administrative stonewalling and manipulation	2
Process takes time to organize and gather information	2
Work-to-rule	1
Poor attendance	1

Bottom Quartile

Reasons:	**Total: 5**
Efforts blocked by administration	2
Stakeholders were slow to appoint representatives	1
Contract difficulties	1
Other structures in place relative to student improvement	1

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study sought to examine the extent to which school characteristics, like achievement outcomes, socio-economic status, and school size, contribute to the SDM team's success in targeting issues of student academic achievement, as called for in New York State by mandate. Were any differences detected between top and bottom quartiles of variables that would help to explain why some SDM teams are more successful than others in targeting issues of student academic achievement?

Each set of quartiles was compared and analyzed descriptively. In the case of academic issues, there appear to be no differences between top and bottom groups of teams addressing academic issues in high and low achievement outcomes schools, as measured by the percentage of Regents diplomas awarded; in high and low SES districts, as measured by the Census Poverty Index; and in large and small schools, as measured by student enrollment rates. One exception is the extent to which SDM teams in low performance schools (94.7 percent) were better than teams in high

performance schools (63.2 percent), and even the entire sample (67.4 percent), in identifying strategies to measure the impact on student achievement. This lends some support to the notion that teams in low performance schools would target academic performance issues more than high performance schools in the sense that, if identifying a measurement strategy is an indicator of the extent to which the purpose of SDM is addressed successfully, teams in low performance schools did so. Overall, no differences appeared between top and bottom groups of high and low SES districts and large and small schools regarding issues of control over the school environment or operational issues.

A closer look at top and bottom quartiles still reveals, overall, that groups of teams address similar issues at similar rates. Regarding the types of issues addressed, few differences were found between top and bottom quartiles of schools, based on the selected variables. High performance schools group appeared focused on low-achievement students and assessment modifications. This would suggest that high performance schools, though they do not focus the SDM team's energies on performance issues for students overall, they do utilize the SDM team to target low student performers. The reasons provided by respondents to explain the failure to address student achievement issues, in almost all cases, indicated that difficulties with key players, such as administrators and union members, blocked SDM teams from functioning appropriately.

One limitation imposed in this study lies in the nature of the original data set. Respondents indicated the extent of their teams' targeting student achievement issues by giving yes/no

responses. It is plausible that there are differences, but that those differences may not be detectable in a yes/no format. If chairpersons were able to respond on a continuum, differences may have been detected.

CONCLUSION

Despite the disparity in the level of success of implementing Shared Decision Making, this descriptive study of the issues the SDM teams are addressing shows few differences amongst top and bottom groupings of schools, based on selected school characteristics. Independent of achievement outcomes, socio-economic status, and enrollment, there really are few differences in activities between high and low groups of SDM teams. Clear patterns which would indicate why teams are addressing the issues that they are do not appear. For example, there are a number of schools that are not too successful by one measure of achievement outcomes. Nevertheless, there are few differences between these and school that are apparently successful in terms of SDM team decision making.

Socio-economic status is no different in terms of its impact on SDM. When high- and low-SES districts are compared, differences in decision-making do not appear to exist. Small and large schools, as determined by enrollment, would, seemingly, have such different environments that the two types of SDM teams would take a different approach to decision-making. Yet, again, large and small schools, based on the measure of enrollment, address similar types of issues.

It must be concluded, therefore, that differences amongst SDM

teams regarding issues addressed must be related to other factors. Other dynamics within the environment, such as school politics; the state of labor relations; the effectiveness of formal leadership; the existence and extent of informal leadership; the culture of the school; the level of desire of stakeholders to share in decision-making; the level of experience and comfort of team-members with collaborative decision-making; and effectiveness of team goal setting are examples. Perhaps these other elements have a much greater impact on SDM success than isolated school variables. Ultimately, the success of SDM teams in targeting student performance issues is not affected by the three selected school variables. Further research is needed which factors in these other, less tangible variables, to determine what features distinguish successful SDM teams from unsuccessful ones.

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